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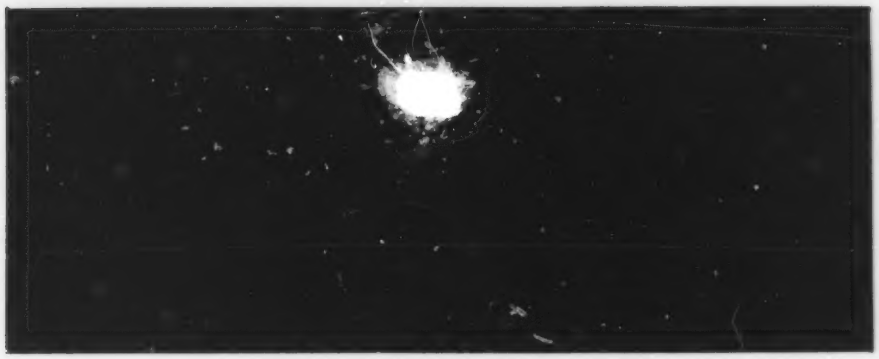

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Final Report

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Provincial 4-H Communications Review

Funded by
The Agriculture Development Fund
February 25, 1988

Prepared by: Patricia Katz
Saskatchewan 4-H Council

The views expressed in this report are those of the author(s). The Agriculture Development Fund (ADF) does not accept responsibility or liability for any conclusions or recommendations in the report, and cannot guarantee the accuracy of its data or observations.

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F I N A L R E P O R T

PROVINCIAL 4-H COMMUNICATIONS REVIEW

Funded by

Saskatchewan Agriculture -
Agriculture Development Fund

Submitted by:
Patricia Katz for
the Saskatchewan 4-H Council

February 25, 1988

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I. BACKGROUND

The Leaders' Bulletin is a six page monthly publication of the Saskatchewan 4-H Council. It is circulated to 2,000 volunteer 4-H leaders in Saskatchewan between October and May.

The Bulletin contains information on: upcoming events and programs; administrative procedures; project teaching resources; promotion materials and ideas; prominent 4-H people and fund-raising opportunities. Paid advertisements and a monthly editorial are features that have been added in the last two years.

The Leaders' Bulletin is written and edited by Saskatchewan 4-H office staff.

II. REVIEW

Objectives:

1. To identify existing information needs.

2. To assess current audience attitudes.

3. To identify additional information needs.

4. To clarify the perceived role and purpose of the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin.

5. To assess the effectiveness of the current 4-H communication program in terms of:
   i) vehicle
   ii) message
   iii) style

6. To identify audience demographics.

III. ABSTRACT

The Communications Review focussed on the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin. Survey results revealed that this publication is seen by 4-H volunteers as the single most important communication vehicle in the 4-H leaders' network.

The review concluded that the Saskatchewan 4-H Council should: continue monthly publication of the Bulletin; adjust deadlines to provide more advance notice of programs; discontinue paid advertisements; add more information on programming ideas, project resources and the 4-H government structural relationship; increase the use of humour and improve the quality of illustrations; and allocate more budget resources to the production of the Bulletin to reflect its perceived usefulness.

IV. SURVEY DESIGN AND STRATEGY

A mail survey was used to collect the material necessary for the communications review. This approach was chosen because it allowed for wide distribution and a feeling of anonymity which encourages more accurate responses. The most positive results of a mail survey are obtained when people are aware of the purpose of the survey in advance. For this reason, the survey was highlighted in the issue of 4-H Leaders' Bulletin which preceded distribution of the questionnaire.

Pretesting was completed with a selected sample of 4-H leaders, and revisions were made to the questionnaire. It was comprised of eighteen questions, of three types: bipolar, open - ended and semantic differential. Bipolar questions provide a choice of two opposite alternatives, or "yes" and "no". Open - ended questions give participants unlimited choices of responses. This type of question is useful when the range of possible replies is unknown, when verbatim responses are required, and when insight into attitudes on sensitive issues is necessary.

Semantic differential questions are used to measure degrees of feeling, attitudes, interest and intentions. This communication review questionnaire used a variety of ranges: "always" to "never"; "excellent" to "poor" and "very useful" to "not useful at all". The respondent was asked to record an opinion on a five-, seven-, or ten-point scale. This type of scale permits the objective measurement of attitudes and opinions.

The survey was sent to 2000 readers; 280 responded.

All responses were tabulated, but mean scores and percentages were calculated on the basis of the number of respondents to each question, not the global number of respondents.

In order to verify the findings of the readership survey, a secondary survey was developed. A mechanical survey package was sent to 25 readers, 16 of whom returned their packages. The mechanical survey method requires that readers mark the actual lines of print that they read when they receive a current issue. The marking is done in highliter on a duplicate copy of the newsletter. The findings from this survey were compared with the written responses of the readership survey.

A completely detailed account of the results of the two surveys is available on request. A summary of major findings appears in the next section.

V. MAJOR FINDINGS

1. 83% of respondents always read the Bulletin. There were no respondents who reported that they never read the publication.

2. 55% of respondents read all of each issue.
37% of respondents read 75% of each issue.
5% of respondents read 50% of each issue.

3. 58% find the publication generally valuable/interesting.
28% find the publication very valuable/interesting.

4. "Listing of upcoming events" was the information category chosen by 231 respondents as the "most read".
"Special program information" scored next.
"Paid advertisements" received the lowest score.

5. "Listings of special events" received a mean score of 1.5, and tied with "special program information" as the most useful items published in the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin. Inspirational messages and paid advertisements scored lowest, with a mean score of 2 and 2.6, respectively.

6. In terms of appearance and format, the front page was the strongest performer with a mean score of 1.6. Paid advertisements receiving a mean score of 2.2, the lowest rating.

7. "What inserts do you think are most valuable" appeared to be a difficult question for participants to answer: Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the group did not respond. Application forms were the single most identified insert (19%); catalogues and brochures were also valuable (12% and 11%, respectively). A wide variety of single items were also suggested. This "other" category accounted for 14% of responses.

   The question dealing with inserts identified as being of least value elicited similar responses. Sixty-five percent (65%) of participants did not respond to the question. This may indicate a lack of interest in the inserts, or an inability to discriminate among the various inserts that have been distributed. Application forms and catalogues were identified by a small percentage of participants (7% and 6%, respectively) as being of little value. Again, a variety of individual inserts were suggested by 22% of respondents as being of least value.

8. The 4-H Leaders' Bulletin emerged as the most preferred vehicle for receiving information about 4-H in the province. Other 4-H leaders (22%) and regional 4-H newsletters (18%) were the other important sources of information.

9. Respondents were asked how they share information with other 4-H members. Two methods were identified as being most used: in person contact (24%) and telephone calls (23%). Informal meetings (17%) and formal meetings (14%) were also mentioned as worthwhile.

   It appears that 4-H members feel more comfortable sharing information in very personal ways. Print and electronic media did not figure prominently as vehicles for information sharing. (This may reflect lack of availability, perceived lack of access, or uncertainty in how to develop effective media contacts.)

10. Almost three-quarters of the respondents (74%) want to receive the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin on a monthly basis. Much lower ratings were given to the bi-monthly (17%) and quarterly (10%) options.

11. Most respondents feel they have a good understanding of the aims and objectives of 4-H (93%) and their role as a 4-H leader (92%). However, only 62% of participants feel they have a good understanding of the structure of 4-H in Saskatchewan. More than one-third of respondents (38%) reported that they did not clearly understand 4-H structure.

12. Respondents to the survey clearly agree that the information provided in the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin is assisting them. Of those who answered the question, 90% feel the Bulletin is meeting their needs for useful material.

13. Readers of the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin have a wide range of interests, reflected in the fact that suggestions for additions to the Bulletin were splintered:

    - 32% of responses fell into the "other" category (categories of five or less votes).
    - 30% want more information on 4-H - Government relationships.
    - 17% want the Bulletin to remain "as is".
    - 14% request ideas for activities.
    - 6% want more regional club news.

    It is important to note that 83% of the 4-H leaders who responded to this question want improvements or additions.

14. Respondents were asked what they would drop from the Bulletin. This proved to be a difficult question - 58% of participants did not respond. A further 28% reported that nothing should be deleted. Paid advertisements were identified by 15% as a component which could be left out of the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin.

One respondent commented that: "News and monthly reminders should be listed as per district. It's confusing to new leaders as to what pertains to our club and what does not."

15. Readers of the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin vary widely in what they like best:

- 28% identified monthly minders.
- 23% like the "up to date" information.
- 10% feel project information is the most useful.

Other suggestions were: "all of it"; procedural information; and Postscript.

Approximately 20% of respondents did not answer this question.

16. When asked what they liked least about the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin, participants were adamant about one area - advertising. Paid advertisements were identified by 54% of the leaders answering the question as an area which wasn't appreciated. "Nothing" was identified by 22%, and 24% of responses ranged over a number of areas - late delivery, assumptions that readers are better-informed than they feel they are, and length - some people want the Bulletin to be longer.

This question was answered by only 25% of the total number of respondents. This may indicate that 4-H leaders feel uncomfortable suggesting that they don't like some aspect of the Bulletin, or that they couldn't think of an area which aroused strong negative responses.

17. More than one-third (36%) of participants reported that they "didn't know" or had no response to the question "What do you believe are the overall aims and objectives of the 4-H movement in Saskatchewan?" Two categories stood out:

- 43% said the overall aim was "to help young people become responsible citizens."
- 34% suggested it was "to help young people learn and reach their full potential."

Other comments were:

- "to teach young people to participate and cooperate" (7%)
- "to develop a sense of pride, self-worth or achievement in young people" (6%)
- "to help young people socialize and have fun" (3%)

18. This question asked participants to provide information about a) length of involvement with 4-H, b) the areas in which they live and c) types of clubs they worked with.

a)
- 14% of respondents have been leaders for 1 year or less.
- 15% have been leaders for two years.

These were the most frequent responses. After six years of involvement (6%), the percentage of responses for additional years of experience dropped.

b)
- 23% of all surveys returned came from the southeast area of the province.
- 16% were returned from the southwest.
- 13% came from the northwest, with the same percentage coming from the east central part of Saskatchewan.
- 12% of the questionnaires came from the northeast.
- 8% of surveys were returned from the west central portion of the province.

This closely parallels the share of registered leadership in various areas of the province.

c) The leaders who completed the questionnaire understand that they are generally active at the district level, with many reporting significant involvement at the regional and provincial levels as well. This is indicative of the interest in 4-H exhibited by respondents and commitment to the movement that leaders have made.

d) Responses were received from 164 general or assistant general leaders and 179 project leaders. Some people checked both categories, which may reflect the varying levels of responsibility people are able to take on for different clubs, or at different points in their lives. From the comments made by some respondents, it would appear that 4-H leaders are family-oriented and community-minded people who are active in other areas, as well.

e) As might be expected, livestock and those dealing with homemaking involve most of the leaders who completed the survey. Multiple clubs are also popular. Beef clubs were identified by 59 respondents, multiple clubs involve 58 people, 48 leaders reported their affiliation with light horse clubs, and homecraft clubs are led by 43 respondents.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

1. The 4-H Leaders' Bulletin is the single most important communication vehicle in the Saskatchewan 4-H leaders' network.

2. A high percentage of 4-H leaders read the Bulletin. Fully 83% of respondents report that they always read the publication. This indicates that leaders find the information interesting or valuable and that they look to the Bulletin for useful, up to date material.

3. "Listings of upcoming events" and "special program information" are the most read categories of the Bulletin. This reflects a widespread need to keep in touch with other regional or provincial activities and the constant requirement for program-related resources. Readers expressed the opinion that the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin makes them feel part of a much larger movement and alleviates the isolation that some feel. "Monthly minders" and "up to date information" were those aspects of the Bulletin liked best, as well as read most. Readers suggested that more program ideas would be a useful addition to the publication.

4. Leaders have a strong preference for first person forms of communication -- in person, telephone calls and meetings are the most preferred ways of sharing information. Print and electronic media did not figure prominently as vehicles for information sharing. This may reflect lack of availability of other communication options; a perceived lack of access to radio, television or newspaper outlets; or uncertainty about how to develop effective media contacts.

5. Leaders prefer to receive the Bulletin on a monthly basis and count on it as a way of assisting them in their leadership role. Ninety percent (90%) of respondents agreed that the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin helped them be more effective leaders. This regular contact appears to be valuable and appreciated. A significant number of respondents indicated that too often notices in the Bulletin identified events and opportunities that were already over. This would indicate that deadlines need to be adjusted.

6. A high percentage of respondents (83%) want improvements or additions to the Bulletin. The areas most requested were information on 4-H - government relationships, and programming information. However, when asked what they would like to see dropped from the publication, 57% did not respond, 28% said "nothing" and 15% identified "paid advertisements". This indicates that reducing resources is not an issue of concern.

This reluctance to request deletions also suggests that respondents feel that "someone finds something of value, even if I don't" or "someone else thinks this is important for someone". This attitude applies also to paid advertisements, which were identified by 54% of respondents as "least liked". Many added "but I know they help defray the costs of the Bulletin."

7. Readers identified the appearance of the front page of the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin as a strong feature. Most readers gave a low score to the appearance and format of the paid advertisements. However, many readers feel that the overall appearance of the publication is good, although illustrations rated unusually low (the standard target is a rating of excellent given by 90% of respondents), and the size of page eases handling. Some respondents want more humour, and more illustrations in the Bulletin.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin be continued on a monthly basis.

2. That if paid advertisements are not necessary financially, delete them. They seem to be a source of irritation, particularly because they were mentioned in both the aided and unaided segments of the survey.

3. That the deadline process be adjusted to ensure that information received is as timely as possible.

4. That the layout and format be analyzed and adjustments made to increase the visual appeal of the publication.

5. That the portion of the communications budget focused on the Bulletin reflect the perceived usefulness of the publication. This may require a reallocation of funds, directing more towards the 4-H Leaders' Bulletin.

6. That workshops or other training opportunities be provided for leaders to encourage them to explore a variety of communication options. This would enable leaders to focus more on outreach.

7. That an annual insert be distributed through the Bulletin, describing the structure of 4-H in Saskatchewan. The insert could take the form of a pocket-sized card and a larger poster for display purposes.

8. That a monthly feature on different clubs or projects be included in the Bulletin. For example, January might focus on beef, February on homemaking and March on light horse information. Advance notice of each "highlight" would ensure that leaders would be aware that their interest was being included.

9. That a regular annual communications review be undertaken, focused especially on:
   - timeliness
   - appropriateness of materials in terms of resource needs
   - visual appeal

10. That consideration be given to developing a process which introduces innovative ideas and tracks when these ideas were presented, to avoid redundant programming.

11. That a monthly column on communication strategies be instituted to assist leaders to develop stronger relationships with parents and the community.

12. That the existing resource sections of the Bulletin be enhanced, particularly program ideas and support resources for leadership development.

13. That results of the communications review be published in the Bulletin, to stress that participation and feedback from leaders is appreciated and useful.

VII. FINDINGS OF NOTE FOR EXTENSION PUBLICATIONS

One might conclude with these suggestions for ongoing extension publications in general:

a) Regularly test for changes in the make up of your reading audience.

b) Assure that information provided is timely.

c) Use humour and quality illustrations to reinforce information.

d) Be aware of assumptions made about minimum levels of understanding on the part of readers.

e) Consider the need to repeat key information at regular intervals as readership turns over and new readers are added.

f) Check to see how changes to your publication are being received (no news is not necessarily good news).

IX. STATEMENT OF EXPENSES

1. Salaries of professional personnel		$3,800.00
Questionnaire Development -	$1,000.00	
Readership Survey Tabulation -	$1,000.00	
Final Report Development -	$1,500.00	
Mechanical Survey	$ 300.00	
2. Salaries - other		$198.09
Typesetting	$ 198.09	
3. Materials, supplies and incidentals		$950.59
Questionnaire Printing	$ 266.04	
Return Postage	$ 113.91	
Mailing Envelopes	$ 269.71	
Return Envelopes	$ 153.73	
Copying - results	$ 147.20	
TOTAL		**$4,948.68**

X. PERSONNEL INVOLVEMENT

The major portions of the review were contracted to Signature Public Relations.

4-H staff time commitment is estimated as follows:

- Patricia Katz (Project Co-ordinator)	42 hours
- G. Schinkel/M. Wickenheiser (Secretarial)	25 hours
- Deb Hauer (Board liason)	3 hours
TOTAL	70 hours